DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 623 JC 880 235

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TITLE Access, Excellence and Student Retention: A Leadership Commitment.
INSTITUTION Cuyahoga Community Coll., Cleveland, Ohio.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 35p.; Reprinted from "Higher Education: Significant and Contemporary Concerns," INFO-TEC, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio, 1987.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Access to Education; Attendance Patterns; Community Colleges; *Dropout Prevention; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Enrollment Influences; *School Holding Power; Stopouts; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students; *Withdrawal (Education)

ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of problems and potential solutions associated with high dropout rates at community colleges. The first sections look at the extent and nature of the dropout problem, highlighting some of the causes of student discontinance, the costs to the individual and society, and the paradox of open access and student retention in higher education. Next, problems related to defining and measuring student retention and withdrawal are discussed, highlighting needs for common definitions, student-centered information, and program-centered information. After underscoring the need for comprehensive student retention programs, the paper offers suggestions for organizing and operating such a program and enumerates essential components. Next, dropout prevention strategies are suggested, including new students' orientation, financial assistance programs, programs promoting a sense of community, and programs promoting academic excellence. Specialized activities for retaining special student groups are also recommended, including programs for at-risk students, former students, and returning students. Guidance on designing and conducting sound, useful evaluations of retention programs is presented next, followed by a case study of Cuyahoga Community College's (Ohio) Urban Demonstration Model, a coordinated effort to facilitate high school to college transitions, improve retention and achievement, and promote two- to four-year college transfer. A list of 31 references is included. (EJV)

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Higher Education: Significant and Contemporary Concerns

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THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF STUDENT RETENTION AND DROPOUT

Meeting the special needs of high risk students in American higher education is a challenge for institutions as well as the broader society. The promise of open admissions has too often turned into a "revolving door" particularly at those institutions seeking to increase their enrollments by marketing their services to students who have traditionally not participated, or been excluded from higher education. While the challenges of access, standards, retention and graduation are equally compelling to two and four-year

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institutions of higher learning, it is the two year, low-cost, open access community and junior colleges which face the most significant challenge. It is these institutions which give meaning to a philosophy, and implement strategies which demonstrate that all persons *can* indeed, learn.

Nationwide, the problem of school leaving or dropout has assumed significant proportions at all levels of the educational system. The Education Commission of the States estimated in 1985 that each year 700,000, or one quarter of all American students at the high school level, drop out before graduating. This figure approaches approximately 50% for inner city schools (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986). Numerous studies support these estimates and provide additional detail concerning the problem (General Accounting Office, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1986; Quinones, 1986a).

Statistical information on the number of students who drop out at the college level is far more difficult to acquire. Noel (1986) estimates that close to 30 percent of all persons entering college in any given year will not attend for their sophomore year. He estimates the figure to be at about the 46 percent level in public community colleges.

Some Causes of Schooling Discontinuation

Many recent studies have attempted to understand why such inordinately large numbers of persons entering American colleges and universities fail to stay in school or to complete the requirements for graduation. The reasons for such failure frequently identified include financial difficulties (Lyke, 1985; Marinnaccio, 1985; Martin, 1986); family and personal problems or responsibilities (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Sprandel, 1986); mental and physical problems (Quinones, 1986a) and poor academic preparation (Moore and Carpenter, 1986; Tinto, 1986). Some studies also take note of the low level of expectations and motivation evident in American youth at this point in the nation's history (Green, 1985; Marinaccio, 1985).

The Cost of School Dropout

When a young person capable of earning a two or four-year college degree enrolls in an appropriate institution but fails to achieve stated educational goals, both the individual and the society sustain enormous financial losses. Henry Levin of Stanford University has estimated that $77 billion dollars are lost annually by society, mostly in the form of taxes on unrealized earnings, as a result of youth dropping out of high school (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986). The loss of needed technical and other skills to the country at a time of greatly increased foreign competition compounds the costs which result from permanent discontinuation from formal schooling.

Financial and other losses to individual dropouts and to their families, including future spouses and children, are also staggering. Study after study documents the reduced earning power (Howell and Frese, 1982; General Accounting Office, 1986; Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986), the poorer physical and mental health, and the decreased opportunities in life (Howell and Frese, 1982; Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986) of dropouts. For a youth, who could do so, not to join that group of persons with two- or four-year college degrees is a significant personal as well as family loss. As the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) so aptly describes it, "a mind is a terrible think to waste."

The Paradox of Access and Student Retention in Higher Education

Access to schooling at any level is a prior condition which must be understood and addressed before the important issue of student retention can be appropriately considered. Until the relatively recent past, trends across the country had not been to increase the degree of access to opportunities for college

education for all who held such aspirations (Green, 1985). The phenomenal pattern of growth in student enrollments at community colleges since the early 1960s does, however, attest to the recognition that access to post-secondary education should be granted to everyone. Thus, increased access to American higher education, made possible in large part through these low tuition, "open door" community colleges, has now become a permanent expectation for all colleges and universities.

Community Colleges have always provided access to higher education for a wide range of "non-traditional" students with few or even no other educational options. With minimal restrictions to enrollment, such schools make available sound opportunities for an increasingly large pool of young people and adults who seek to complete two-year career or technical training or to pursue a two year course of study leading to an applied science degree. Community Colleges also provide opportunities for young people and adults who wish to prepare to move on to four-year baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. Disproportionate numbers of minority, financially disadvantaged and educationally underprepared students have therefore gravitated to two-year colleges (Olivas, 1979).

With fewer restrictive admission policies, community colleges are, however, generally more at risk than are four-year schools as regards the number of students who can be called dropouts. Community colleges are considerably more likely to accept students who would be rejected as "poor academic risks" by four-year colleges and universities. Thus, a relatively larger proportion of community college students tend to be less academically well-prepared than students enrolled in more traditional four-year schools.

Another factor pertinent to the student retention and dropout levels at community colleges is that a relatively high proportion of students work part-time or full-time while

attending classes in order to obtain a two-year degree. Many such students have limited financial resources, and are at a greater risk of experiencing financial difficulties than is the case among students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities.

SOME ISSUES RELATED TO STUDENT RETENTION AND DROPOUT

Defining Student Retention and Dropout

A major failure of the statistics which describe present institutional efforts to retain students until they achieve their career goals relates to inadequate definitions and well-understood information concerning student retention and educational dropout. Incomplete definitions of these two terms hamper the accuracy of their measurements. They also restrict the nature and range of approaches to improving the opportunities for students to achieve their educational goals.

Admittedly, the reasons for school dropout usually cited in the literature do not altogether consider an appropriate distinction between students who frequently fail to participate in some predictable fashion in an educational program and those whose discontinued participation is temporary, but unpredictable, even though intended. This distinction is particularly relevant in estimating the statistics which describe the dropout rate among community and junior college students. The typical profile found in such populations is one of a twenty-six year old female head of household attending part-time and with responsibility for one or more children under the age of six. Such a student profile results in the completion of these traditional two-year degree programs only over a period of five to six years. The time to completion of traditional four-

year degree programs are also affected by the changing student demographics. Two-year post-secondary educational institutions will continue to attract an increasingly more mature student population when compared to their four-year counterparts. The impact of family and employment responsibilities on a pattern of "intermittent" college attendance becomes an important consideration in defining student achievement of educational and career goals. Such goals frequently fall short of actual degree attainment.

To successfully consider the complex issue of student retention, particularly in higher education, it is, therefore, essential that more accurate working definitions be formulated. The following definitions are offered:

- Retention — The continued participation of students, intending to achieve some specific educational goal, in an educational system until such educational goals have been achieved or graduation occurs.
- Dropout — A student who formerly participated in a formal educational program with the intent of achieving some specific educational goal or of graduating but who terminated his or her affiliation with that or another degree-granting institution even though his or her circumstances were such that the student could have remained and "graduated" (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Tinto, 1986).
- Intermittent Student — A student who has chosen to achieve his or her educational goal by moving alternately among job related career pursuits, formal educational experiences and personal leisure. It is difficult to classify this student in traditional higher education terms. An increasingly large proportion of today's two-year college students fall in this category.

The use of these definitions results in certain significant distinctions among college-going students. While degree-seeking students are still being considered, a less global

distinction is suggested for "dropouts." A student is not a "dropout" if he or she transfers to another institution. More must also be understood about the "intermittent student" in order to assess where this student fits in decisions related to educational programming. An adult student who acquires the base knowledge and skills to move from a degree focused program into a career-work situation need also not be tallied as a college "dropout."

In considering these definitional issues, other practical matters related to student dropout emerge. Should a community college, for example, commit sizable amounts of its resources in order to "retain" students who wish to complete degree requirements on a continuing attendance basis as contrasted with others lacking the interest, preparation or personal circumstances which enable them to succeed in a less predictable fashion? Issues of mission as well as legal and moral questions come to mind. Such issues must, however, continue to be addressed if student retention efforts are to be systematically developed and sustained throughout all levels of education.

The Importance of Student Retention Information

An educational institution committed to maximizing student retention cannot organize and operate an effective program without pertinent information (Morrow, 1986; Noel, 1986; Quinones, 1986a). Having no accurate data or figures on students who have dropped out or who are at risk to do so poses a serious disadvantage to effective program development. Just as important is the reliable knowledge concerning which institutional efforts have a positive impact on student retention. What kind of information would be useful in assessing student retention? Such information may be either student or program-centered (Levitz, 1986). Systematic collection and utilization of both program and student data for evaluation and program improvement purposes must be an

integral part of any strategy related to the degree completion of to other educational goal attainment of students.

Student-Centered Information. Educational institutions invariably collect certain information on students on a periodic basis. They are thus in a position to conduct some limited analyses of students who graduate or who fail to do so. Careful analysis of additional student-centered information related to retention policies and practices would greatly reduce the amount of guesswork which enters the process of developing and maintaining effective student retention programs. Yet, how many institutions have identified the pertinent student data to collect on retention policies, have obtained and updated it, have analyzed it, and have then established and operated programs based on such data driven knowledge and expectations? The literature suggests that the number is indeed few (Astin, 1975; Mann, 1985; Levitz and Noel, 1986; Morrow, 1986).

Institutional policy makers and program management staffs will be better positioned to do strategic as well as operational planning with access to pertinent information that is properly analyzed. Strong institutional commitment to student access, retention and graduation will be required to provide justification for research and evaluation strategies which call for maintenance of such information and data analyses in order to enhance planning, however. Answers to what kinds of questions are critical to effective student retention programs? For example, what factors correlate with students' stay in college? Which students are the most likely candidates for non-educational goal attainment? Properly focused information which addresses these and other useful policy issues ranges from program based cost-benefit analyses to student learning outcomes. Institutions working alone or with such organizations as The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) are well-advised to make such information available as

an integral part of their planning for improvements in student retention.

Program-Centered Information. Effective student retention programming also requires the use of information concerning academic and non-academic programs, including those not necessarily perceived as directly related to student retention (Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Marinaccio, 1985; Smith, Lippett and Sprandel, 1986). Academic and student services intervention strategies, properly linked with student support initiatives, can affect student dropout rates. For example, colleges which do not offer basic remedial courses, yet admit large numbers of students who are not adequately prepared academically will not be able to retain large proportions of their students. This student loss will be caused, in part, by the academic program and staff that is available (Noel and Levitz, 1983; Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Moore and Carpenter, 1986). Schools with instructional staff who teach at sub-standard levels may also expect to see the more ambitious students "dropping out" if other options are available. Thus, it is important that educational institutions create stronger "matches" between their academic programs and the student body they serve. Reliable and pertinent information on students as well as on aspects of the academic and student services program are therefore crucial to making decisions concerning these areas.

THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT RETENTION PROGRAMS

The dilemma of student retention has always plagued educational institutions. The extent of such dilemma has varied with the location of institutions and the economic and other demographic characteristics of their students. Only in recent years have thoughtful, well-organized efforts been undertaken, however, to understand the significant attributes of effective student retention programs. It is even more recently

that focused attention has been given to establishing and operating programs designed to reduce the numbers of students who would otherwise fail to complete their short or long-term educational goals. (Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Lyke, 1985; Noel, 1986; Quinones, 1986.) Growing public awareness of the crisis has helped to encourage student retention efforts (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986). The increasing inability of higher education institutions to retain the changing (demography) of students to the completion of their educational goals has also been an important incentive for focused program development efforts.

The nature of the crisis, the grown knowledge, and increased appreciation of the costs of discontinued education to society and to individuals make it imperative that effective, coordinated retention programs become an essential feature of educational institutions. Indeed, it may be argued that anything less than a total commitment to student retention speaks well for educational failure. Such failure on the part of the nation's educational community and its supporters will result only in larger numbers of young people and adults who are unable to function effectively in their own as well, it will impact on the economic and social development of their families, communities and of themselves.

Though virtually every modern educational institution directs some of its effort toward student retention, many such efforts are, at best, fragmented (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Morrow, 1986). They typically operate with a dearth of pertinent information (Astin, 1975; Levitz, 1986), are understaffed (Kramer, 1985; Marinaccio, 1985), and are seldom based on clearly formulated, understood or attainable goals and objectives (Noel, 1986). Many higher education institutions have utilized Title III (Developing Institutions), Tri-O (Access) and other special federal and state programs to organize, structure and implement their student recruitment and retention programs. However, because the causes which

under lie and are associated with increasing rates of student dropout and patterns of intermittent educational participation are complex in nature, programs which are not comprehensive and well designed tend to be inadequate or ineffective (Astin, 1975; Marinaccio, 1986; Smith, Lippitt and Sprandel, 1986).

Individual Assessment Programs: Increased attention to student testing and assessment programs aimed at facilitating their placement in the most appropriate courses is also important to designed programs which give the best assurance of student success, hence retention. Project Equality (EQ) sponsored by the College Board and other special programs available through the Educational Testing Services (ETS), which focus on the need for student assessment are examples of available resources which can be useful in structuring programs to improve student retention and graduation rates, both at the high school and college levels.

ORGANIZING AND OPERATING A COMPREHENSIVE RETENTION PROGRAM: A LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

It may be assumed that no conventional educational institution completely lacks some effort aimed at improving the retention of its students. Accordingly, it must be recognized that new retention programs are not established without some history and structural context. Designing and implementing comprehensive effective retention programs must therefore take into account existing programs and activities (Noel, 1986).

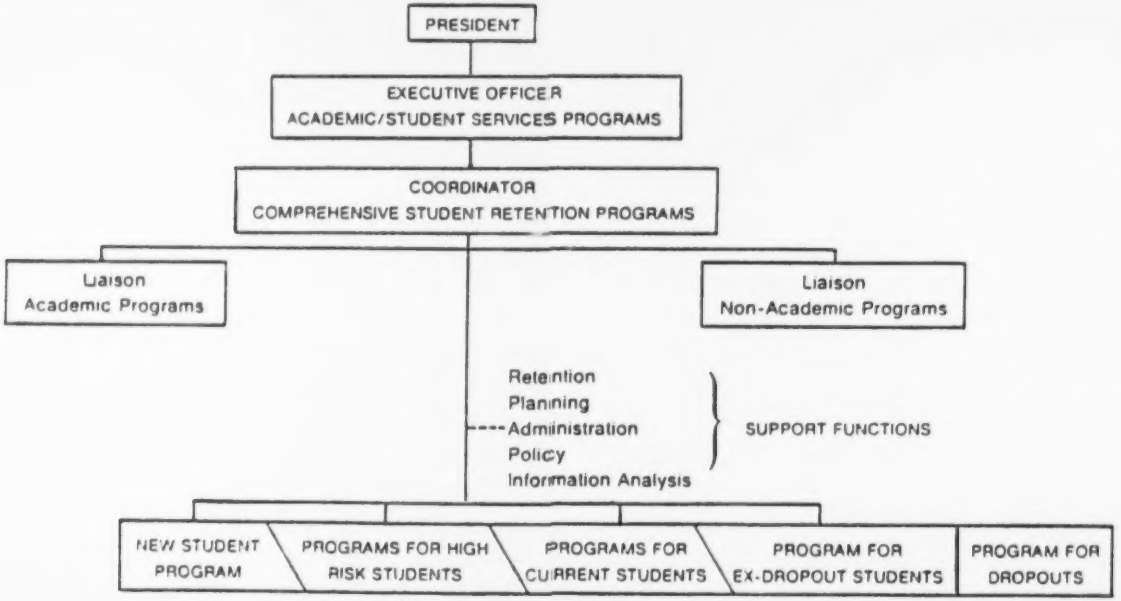
Given the non-original nature of such programs, what is required on the part of institutional leadership is a clear commitment to strategy planning and model building that does not "reinvent the wheel." Clear definition of existing roles

and responsibilities of staff should be reviewed carefully prior to adding new staff to address access, retention and special needs programming. Strategic planning techniques can be useful in redefining, restructuring and implementing comprehensive retention programs that have a high probability of improving institutional performance in this important area. Special counseling, student service and academic support programs, funded through outside grants, should be integrated into a preplanned institutional strategy and design if maximum success is to be achieved. Vestibule, or special programs that are organized and operated on the periphery, with little connection to the core programs of the institution, do little to enhance the long term success of retention and graduation programs designed for special populations. The primary objective of such "special" initiatives must be their catalytic value in creating change in the basic core of the institution.

Designing an Organizational Structure for Student Retention

A "generic" organizational chart for a comprehensive program model of the kind described in this chapter would include the elements shown in Figure 1. The executive officer responsible for the planning, development and implementation of a comprehensive student retention program would be accountable directly to the President of the institution. The high level of support, visibility and the sensitivity to policy formulation at the highest level of the institution, that is inherent in a total commitment to student retention requires such an approach (Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Quinones, 1986a).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT RETENTION PROGRAM MODEL



An important strength of the program would be those components specifically designed to coordinate pertinent academic and non-academic activities and programs which are deemed to significantly affect student retention. In such a model, jurisdictional issues would have to be dealt with. Clearly stated policies as well as effective use of interpersonal skills and informal management practices applicable to comprehensive student retention program (CSRP) coordination will help resolve questions of this nature.

Internal to the program would be a number of mainstay components — primarily those related to academic and non-academic program coordination and feedback. Additional components designed to work directly with various identified segments of the student body — students at risk; new students; current dropouts; and former dropouts who have returned would also be essential. A discussion of dropout prevention strategies focusing on the latter student groups, for the purpose of building and implementing such a model, appears later in this chapter.

An effective student retention program will also be concerned with the development and implementation of internal policies and procedures; the formulation of feasible goals and objectives and the ongoing evaluation of the processes as well as outcomes of student retention efforts. The operation of the program would be planned as an integral part of plans developed for the academic year. Specialized information-gathering activities and efforts focusing on encouraging students to return to the institution, however, would take place throughout the year. These latter efforts would also demonstrate to the community and the student body the institution's commitment to retention through any practical means.

Elements of a Comprehensive Student Retention Program

Comprehensive retention programs should be designed to include the following elements and operations:

* A centrally planned and managed, comprehensive student retention program offices charged with responsibility for operating and/or coordinating the institution's activities relating to retention and dropout issues (Marinaccio, 1985; Noel, 1986; Quinones, 1986a). A direct commitment from the institutional leader with clear delegation of responsibility to a major line officer, normally the Vice President or Dean of Student or Academic Services, is essential to the successful development and implementation of this student retention model.
* The incorporation, with needed modifications of all pre-existing retention programs and program components, from student services and academic affairs, into the comprehensive student retention program as appropriate (Noel, 1986).
* An ongoing mechanism for data collection, analysis and reporting related to academic programs and offerings and non-academic programs and activities in order to identify the positive as well as negative effects of such programs and services in encouraging students to complete their education and career goals (Noel, 1986).
* The establishment and operation of the comprehensive student retention program within the context of clearly defined goals, objectives and expected outcomes. These should be developed in conjunction with the design of pertinent evaluation methodologies to be applied to the program.

Some Dropout Prevention Strategies

The primary goal of a comprehensive student retention program is to maximize the number of students who graduate from, or otherwise achieve their education and career goals by attending the institution. Every student who leaves the institution, having accomplished a clearly defined set of goals, should be considered a "victory" for the comprehensive student retention program. Many student retention strategies have been tested over many years in a variety of academic settings (Astin, 1975; Lyke, 1985; Ellison, 1986; Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Noel, 1986). Among the more common dropout prevention strategies defined in terms of program components are orientation programs for new students, financial assistance programs, programs promoting a sense of community and academic excellence, as well as other direct personal assistance supports.

New Students' Orientation. One of the most common activities which academic institutions undertake to encourage students to remain in school is to demonstrate a welcoming, caring, respectful environment through a well planned new student orientation program. Such programs encourage and offer opportunities for new students to participate in the student community at the earliest possible time. They also communicate to them the institution's concern and interest in their well-being and adjustment to the new setting.

Schools which lack sound freshman orientation and advising programs and which make little effort to help new students become a part of the educational community do themselves a disservice as regards retention. Providing information on the goals, activities, and accomplishments of such programs to students is also of importance to a well coordinated retention program (Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Smith, Lippitt and Sprandel, 1986; Titley, 1986).

Financial Assistance Programs. Many students choose to discontinue pursuit of their educational goals because of

financial considerations. Comprehensive student retention program activities must be designed to assist in maximizing the amount and kinds of funds available to students (Martin, 1986). Such assistance may take the form of loans, work opportunities or assistance in job placement in the community.

Scholarships and the availability of a wide range of other financial assistance programs play a central role in helping institutions to retain students. This is especially true when large numbers of economically "disadvantaged" young people and adults with limited income to support both education and family comprise the majority of the student body. Institutions sensitive to such student needs will endeavor to make a wide range of financial supports available. They will also make the best continuing use of the information available on the relationships between student retention and various forms of financial assistance (Lyke, 1985; Martin, 1986). In the latter regard, efforts to link co-operative education and work study programs to the career objectives and academic goals of students as part of a strategy for linking aspirations and hopes with meaningful life experiences are also useful financial support considerations.

Programs Promoting a Sense of Community. Persons who feel they are a part of, or members of, a special community are less likely to leave that community of shared goals and experiences, in numerous ways, that this can be an important asset in student retention. That educational institutions typically promote a sense of community, of shared goals and experiences, in numerous ways. An active student government respected by the institution; clearly defined mechanisms for two-way communication among administrators, faculty and students; the availability of a wide range of support systems and support groups; and the active involvement of the institution in its own larger community are all areas which help to develop a feeling of community membership among students.

Programs Promoting Academic Excellence. Efforts to maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to learning are also required in order to increase student retention. It is therefore important that institutions assess themselves against well known criteria for effective schooling (Green, 1985). These principles and criteria have been proven particularly appropriate in a number of school districts, such as Detroit, Memphis, Philadelphia and Cleveland. A pilot test of the applicability of this essential model is currently being tested at Cuyahoga Community College's Metropolitan Campus. The criteria for effective schooling include effective instructional leadership, a safe and orderly environment, systematic assessment and feedback concerning student progress, a climate of high expectations and a focus on effective student preparation in basic skills.

Other Direct Assistance Programs. Other non-academic services which offer help to students who wish to remain in school vary with students needs. They include career counseling (Lyke, 1985; Sprandel, 1986); health counseling (including programs on substance abuse prevention and treatment) (Kramer *et al.*, 1985; Quinones, 1986); and family, job and psychological counseling. For many students, the presence of religious supports and services may also be an important factor in their continued persistence to complete career and educational goals. Housing assistance and help in dealing with governmental institutions and processes are also important. An effective comprehensive student retention program will include program referral services which focus on these and similar areas of student needs. The coordination of the efforts of the comprehensive student retention program with those of other non-academic and community programs and groups must also be developed and nurtured.

The collection and use of processes and outcomes of programs is of critical importance in assessing institutional efforts to retain students. The dissemination of information to

current, as well as potential students concerning the availability and confidentiality of these services is also important. Institutions with a wide range of assistance programs which do not make this information available, or which make the process of obtaining such assistance unduly difficult, delimit their ability both to attract and to retain students.

Retention of Special Student Groups

A comprehensive student retention program, it is clear, will include carefully designed components related to planning, policy formulation, evaluation and other support functions of effective programs. Such a program will also require specialized activities designed to meet the needs of at least three special categories of students. These three groups are as follows:

* Students who may reasonably be expected (e.g., because of pre-college preparation) to be at greater risk of educational discontinuation than their fellow students.
* Students who have interrupted their schooling, but who may reasonably be expected to re-enroll at some time in the future; and
* Students who have previously interrupted their schooling, but who have returned to continue toward some education or career goal.

A student retention program which focuses only on the special needs of these three categories of students would generally not be appropriate for the majority of students for whom prevention is the most important goal. The needs of these three categories of students, along with intervention strategies appropriate to them, are described below.

Students at Risk. A review of research findings and careful reflections on one's experience with students should quickly make it clear that students possessing certain attributes are more prone to pose a challenge to their retention than are

students without these attributes (General Accounting Office, 1986; Kilstad and Owings, 1986; Quinones, 1986a). Students "at risk" to discontinue their education are found most often in one or more of the following groups:

* Freshmen and other new students (Titley, 1986).
* Students with poor academic preparation (Moore and Carpenter, 1986).
* Students with a history of having dropped out of other educational institutions (Tinto, 1986).
* Students who are experiencing, or who may be expected to experience, financial difficulties (Martin, 1986).

Early identification based on analysis of information (grades, attendance, financial status, health status, etc.) to identify students who are at risk, followed by clearly defined strategies for intervention in accordance with established policies and practices coordinated by a "case manager" assigned to an individual student, would constitute the framework for early intervention to avoid academic failure and dropout.

Former Students. Carefully targeted activities would also focus on students who have already "dropped out" in order to determine the reason for such actions. Intervention would have the goal of encouraging and assisting them in returning to continue their education (Tinto, 1986). It should be recalled, however, that students manifest their "dropout" status from education in a variety of ways. One student may stop attending classes, another may "announce" in the middle of a semester that he or she will not return for the ensuring term. Yet another may call attention to a need for assistance by a visible lack of interest or motivation while attending classes on a regular basis. Opportunities to intervene with students who are likely to drop out will range from many to none.

When the opportunity offers itself, and even if the dropout action appears inevitable, an exit interview between the student and appropriate comprehensive student retention

program staff is strongly recommended (Marinaccio, 1985). Well designed survey instruments, modified through time to benefit from experience with particular categories of students, should be used to elicit pertinent information concerning the reasons for leaving. Over time, the analysis of stated or assumed reasons for students' departures prior to achievement of educational goals would help to determine whether the institution should expend the resources required to re-enroll former dropouts in the institution. For the latter purpose, students leaving the institution would be categorized in terms of only two groups: Those remaining in the local area who have not enrolled in another academic institution, and whose circumstances are such that they could, in the near or later future, continue their education, and all other non-returning students, on the other hand.

Activities to encourage and assist dropouts to re-enroll would then only be directed at former students who meet the criteria in the first category (Pappas and Loring, 1986).

Prescribed retention or re-enrollment activities designed for specific students would address the reason(s) why each student dropped out. For example, financial problems would be dealt with by an expert in financial aid matters; family problems would be dealt with through appropriate counseling services internal to the institution or located within the community. In all cases, a designated "case manager" would serve as a facilitator and advocate for the student, securing and otherwise providing needed services.

Returning Students. A variety of circumstances may be encountered among students who dropped out but have returned to the institution to work toward completion of their education. At one end of a continuum, such a student may have dropped out for one term for health or other personal reasons but always intended to return. At the other end of the continuum may be a marginal student in need of extensive academic preparation, financial support and personal or other

counseling who was "talked into trying another term" by his or her counselor, family or fellow students. A detailed assessment is therefore recommended for each student returning after a minimal period of absence. The purpose of this assessment of skills, goals and needs would aid in the development of an individualized plan of activities and services to maximize the chances of achieving defined goals (Pappas and Loring, 1986).

Evaluating Student Retention Programs

Sound, useful evaluation of retention program requires the selection and design of pertinent and realistic program goals and objectives as well as intervention strategies and processes. It also presumes that clear statements of expected outcomes, accountabilities and data collection methods be formulated as an integral part of the program design and development phase, rather than after the program has become operational (Suchman, 1967). It is also important that pertinent information be collected before a program begins its operation and thus, before changes in modifiable behaviors and other indicators of success can be affected.

Because the development of comprehensive student retention programs will almost invariably take place in a context of previously existing programs and services, it will not be feasible in most cases to establish the most desirable evaluation component under ideal circumstances. Recognition of these ideals should, however, guide the preparation of a design that is both practical and useful.

The primary purpose of the evaluation should be to guide program adjustment, resource allocation and program planning. Applied research and evaluation findings will allow a college or university President or The Director of a comprehensive retention program to distinguish, with a relative degree of assurance, program components which "work" and others which do not. Such information will also

determine the degree to which practices are useful in improving student retention and academic performance. The objectivity (often best stated in numerical terms) of outcome data is also important. Short- and long-term trend lines which describe program impact can, for example, be established and charted. The appropriate design and implementation of an effective evaluation scheme will compel periodic review of actual progress toward expected outcomes for program goals and objectives, stated in ways that are measurable (Suchman, 1967; Quinones, 1986a). This would be the case for both process and outcome goals.

While an effective student retention program would have its ongoing evaluation performed by qualified persons not directly associated with the program, it is important that staff be directly involved in understanding the design and results of analyses; that they clearly understand the nature of expected outcomes and the measures which most appropriately reflect such outcomes. Program performance against stated goals and objectives would occur at least annually, and would be undertaken with the practical application of the findings always in mind. In the latter regard, it would be expected that program components and practices that are found to be effective, and for which the need in fact exists, would be firmly institutionalized. Components and practices determined to be less effective or even counterproductive to student retention would be appropriately modified or eliminated throughout the institution.

That student retention program goals and objectives are stated in clearly defined terms for objective verification and measurement cannot be overstated. Examples of primary and secondary goals which might be appropriate for a comprehensive retention program include such statements as the following:

* To reduce the number of dropouts, as defined, from 37

percent of the total student body (as calculated for the 86-87 school year) to 35 percent, 33 percent and 31 percent respectively for the 1987-1988, 1988-1989, and 1989-1990 school years.

* To accomplish the major goals of the program, as stated, on budgets of $X,000, $Y,000, $Z,000 respectively for the 1987-1988, 1988-1989, and 1989-1990 school years.
* To enhance the freshman orientation program such that during their first full month of enrollment, students will have completed a weekend program consisting of 12 hours of programming, and three evening events of three hours each — the 18 hours to be devoted to introducing them to the school and the school community, and to consist of information concerning (specified) topics.

These brief examples indicate the degree to which careful preparation and statement of goals and objectives will greatly facilitate the evaluation process and the applicability of the findings to mid course changes related to such areas as planning, scheduling, control, coordination and supervision of program activities as well as resource allocation.

STUDENT RETENTION AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE — A CASE STUDY

For over two decades, Cuyahoga Community College has responded to the dilemma of educational access and opportunity for urban and minority students. The efforts of the College have resulted in measurable success, but the institution also acknowledges that much of the challenge still remains to be met.

In attempting to help students overcome both personal and structural barriers to higher education, Cuyahoga Community College has focused primarily on a strategy of inter-institutional articulation. This strategy seeks to smooth the

transitions students must make from secondary schools to two-year schools to four-year schools and to improve the chances of their retention at each of these levels. The major elements of change affected by Cuyahoga Community College's articulation approach are curricular improvements, academic and student support services, development of student information systems and enhancement of transfer agreements and opportunities.

As it began its third decade, Cuyahoga Community College established a five year strategy (1984-1989) to improve educational access, opportunity, retention and success for students seeking associate and baccalaureate degrees. Each element of this effort was designed to operate within the context of Cuyahoga Community College's overall strategic planning and institutional development framework.

Thus, on October 1, 1984, the College established a Center for Articulation and Transfer Opportunities (CATO). The Center's mandates were to provide institution-wide leadership, coordination, evaluation, policy research and reporting services, particularly as they relate to enhancement of articulation, retention and transfer opportunities.

During 1986, Cuyahoga Community College further recognized a need to take full advantage of its rapidly growing programs and resources related to improving the access and retention in educational programs of young people before and during post-secondary education. What was needed was a more effective theoretical framework that would provide a "map" for the College's longitudinal strategy for institutional change. The College's Urban Demonstration Model addresses that need. It describes a theoretical context for the College's coordinated efforts to facilitate high school to college transitions; improve student retention and academic achievement; and facilitate two-year to four-year college transfer. Cuyahoga Community College's Urban Demonstration Model also provides an institutional

framework for evaluations and analyses designed to assess the accomplishment of goals for both program outcomes and institutional change.

The Urban Demonstration Model was developed as a collaborative and aggressive strategy for effective schooling in a large urban area. It addresses the College's acknowledgment that, to ensure the success of large groups of minority students in two-year colleges, an institution must develop a strategy that is clearly tied to a collegewide sense of purpose and priority. The model delineates a set of theoretical principles, the expected outcomes, institutional structure and operational responsibilities involved in such an undertaking.

The decision to launch a full-fledged and highly coordinated model to enhance minority student access, retention and success is grounded in some fundamental premises. These are summarized below:

- Consistent with its mission and philosophy, an institution must undertake change to improve minority student success in a way that is clearly understood and reflected as a *strategy for overall institutional advancement.*
- Effective strategy requires that *cooperative relationships* be developed with urban high schools and four-year colleges and universities in the interest of students who will enter and exit at these levels of the educational continuum.
- A *clear definition and well-understood theoretical framework* (including expected outcomes and evaluation measures) must govern the development of efforts to effect both short and long term institutional change.
- Executive leadership is an important key to institutional change. However, in the absence of singular line reporting relationships, *clearly defined structural relationships and accountability structures* are required.

Of particular significance to its student retention programming is the development of its theoretical framework

for student success as a means of organizing and implementing programs designed to implement the Urban Demonstration Model.

The purpose of any theory or framework is to establish a sense of order around which objectives for accomplishing relevant outcomes can be developed. Because institutional change to improve student retention and success requires that coherence be created from seemingly disparate functions in structurally different areas, such a sense of order is particularly important. It provides the pegs on which to hang each activity and simultaneously describes the contribution of each objective. A theoretical framework also serves to define a set of institutional outcomes against which the implementation of plans can be evaluated. Decisions concerning program modification, resource allocation and the placement of institutional responsibilities are also facilitated.

In the case of Cuyahoga Community College, "effective schools" theory provides the beginning framework around which to organize programmatic efforts to increase opportunities and improve the likelihood of student retention and educational success, particularly among minority students. Through extensive faculty and administrative discussions, program review and analysis and thorough review of the effective schools' literature, this theoretical model is being modified and expanded to meet the needs of both high school and community college students. Much of the research, evaluation and writing on effective schools in the past has focused on student achievement at the elementary and middle school levels. Cuyahoga Community College is providing national leadership in the application of this theory at the high school and community college levels.

In addition to presenting academic credibility, this theory is also sufficiently inclusive and adaptable to accommodate the broad range of objectives which are required to improve institutional effectiveness. The factors which have been shown

to distinguish effective from ineffective schools, and are adapted below as the theoretical framework for Cuyahoga Community College's Urban Demonstration Model are the following:

- A statement of *school mission* that is clearly defined, communicated to, and understood by its public as well as by its administrators, teachers and students.
- An emphasis on *school-community relations* (parents, businesses, civic organizations) that is required for cooperative planning implementation and support of educational programs. This exemplifies and communicates to students the mission and purpose of schools, the expectations of exemplary performance, the nature of teacher support that is available to assure such performance and the individual's responsibility for learning.
- An emphasis on *academic foundations* that is associated with students' ability to read, write, compute and process information with a minimum level of difficulty.
- A *school learning climate* that cultivates respect and mutually trusting relationships among students, teachers and administrators in a manner that enhances student learning.
- Strong and effective *leadership*, particularly in the instructional and student support domains. Such leadership confers with and advises teachers and students about learning outcomes and assures prompt solutions to enhance support for the school.
- *High expectations* are grounded on a belief that all students can achieve well beyond their current levels, and that student learning is a responsibility shared by both teachers and learners. Teachers are expected to provide high quality instruction, and to maintain high standards of learning. Students are expected to function at the highest motivational, perseverance and capability levels.

and to accept personal responsibility for their performance.

* Continuous *instructional assessment and feedback* that are used to motivate students as well as to form the basis of corrective action. The objectives of instruction, along with the level of skills, knowledge and competencies which students are expected to learn must be clearly understood by each student.

The theoretical principles described above will be assessed in terms of their applicability to instructional and support programs jointly or separately designed and administered by Cuyahoga Community College, other cooperating colleges and universities, and urban public high schools in Northeastern Ohio.

Current modifications to the Model for student retention established at Cuyahoga Community College is taking place to further assure that the institution remains responsive and responsible in its efforts to address the changing needs of its student body. The Urban Demonstration Model is, for example, now being structured to create articulation linkages with public schools on one end and colleges and universities on the other. These "bridges" across the three levels of education are designed to encourage students to continue toward their educational goals with the assurance of well integrated curricula ladders, educational plans, integrated personal, academic and career support systems (including financial aid planning) as well as monitoring, record keeping and feedback related to their progress (Ellison & Smith, 1986).

CONCLUSION

Problems associated with high school and college dropout rates have reached a level such that a substantial response is called for from the academic community as well as others concerned with the future of America. Effective retention programs at the college and university level are, in general, in

their infancy. They operate in a context lacking a generally accepted body of research and practices that have been deemed effective. That there is not yet a commonly agreed upon definition of the term "dropout" is ample evidence of issues related to the best approaches to address the dilemma of student retention.

The urgency of the problem, however, requires that attempts be made to design appropriate models of student retention programs, at least conceptually. It would appear appropriate, based on the findings to date, that a model retention program would be comprehensive; centralized; reporting directly to the executive officer with leadership responsibility for academic and student support services; and capable of extensive information gathering and analysis. Such a model would include program components differentiated for various student populations in addition to its "all student" approach and would be evaluated through a carefully designed formative evaluation process. Given the current state of the art in retention research and programs, it would likewise be appropriate that models of student retention programs maintain considerable room for flexibility in their design. Such flexibility would allow for needed changes, as determined by the results of on-going evaluation and student needs information.

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